

Medicine between Science and Art of Healing

– Reflections on their Relationship in Plato and the Hippocratic Corpus

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This paper deals with the relationship between medicine and philosophy in the classical period in a very narrow and exemplary manner. It is therefore necessary to specify what can be discussed in the following: Thus I would like (1) to shed light on the philosophical classification of the essence of medical art by interpreting some passages from the work of Plato. In addition to the great respect for the art of medicine, we will also learn about the harsh judgement of a certain kind of medicine that may be very close to that practised today. Furthermore, (2) it will become clear how philosophy differs from medical knowledge - and how it is considered superior to it.

Then (3) a medical view of the relationship between medicine and philosophy will be presented, based on a frequently treated passage from the Corpus Hippocraticum, namely from *De priscamedicina*. The supposedly clear opposition of empirical medical art to science-based medicine turns out to be at least questionable. Finally, (4) I will have a short look on the proximity of the concept of the physician in Plato's Dialogue on Laws and the Hippocratic Oath.

I will take the liberty of presenting some passages in more detail. I would also like to point out that I am not reporting anything really "new" here, most of the insights to be presented here come from scholarly studies by Pohlenz, Diller and Picht, for example.¹ These are worthy of being remembered and their insights brought to bear anew.

But they deserve to be recalled, not least because in the wake of the social and political reaction to the Corona virus we are suffering these days across the globe the firm hegemony of a medicine that sees itself as a science rather than a healing art and of an abstract mode of thinking. The pressing relevance of the question about the well-understood nature of medicine is again becoming abundantly clear these days: Is medicine about researching diseases or is it about people being sick? Does the performance of medicine show itself in general statements and regularities or must it prove itself in the living subject, the individual human being? If the doctor is an expert in medicine, how can the layman judge whether the medicine advised to him will be the right one? To which doctor does society listen?

These questions are not new; they have also been the subject of reflection on medicine and the doctor in classical Greece. References to the doctor and his activity are numerous in Plato's work, as is the recourse to health and illness in general.

(1) Platon on Legislation and Medicine

At the beginning of the great discussion about the laws, Plato stages a debate about the right aim of the legislation. For the Cretan and Spartan interlocutor, this is known and taken for granted: one

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¹ Cf. Pohlenz 1938, Diller 1952, Picht 1990.

must be prepared for war. But to the stranger from Athens this seems wrong. For no stability and no development is conceivable for a community if it is not harmoniously put together. The state of constant mobilisation lives only through the external enemy and is therefore also internally hostile: It can only dominate the open antagonisms of its society through oppression. Not everyone survives this and nobody can live well there. Instead of driving one of the two parties to the conflict away or suppressing it, it would be more promising to reconcile the two (which Plato also calls the real task of politics in other places). In this context, the Athenian refers to two different ways in which the doctor can orientate himself.

"Athenian: The highest good, however, is neither war nor civil strife-which things we should pray rather to be saved from-but peace one with another and friendly feeling. Moreover, it would seem that the victory [628d] we mentioned of a State over itself is not one of the best things but one of those which are necessary. For imagine a physician supposing that a human body was best off when it was sick and aged with physic, while never giving a thought to the case of the body that needs no physic at all! Similarly, with regard to the well-being of a State or an individual, that man will never make genuine statesman who pays attention primarily solely to the needs of foreign warfare, nor will he make a true lawgiver unless he designs his legislation for peace [628e] rather than his peace legislation for war."(Laws)¹

The legislator fulfils the function for which he exists only when he brings together the city in its differences and forms a unity. If he does not create a peace order, he does not understand why a state needs a constitution at all. He does not understand that a constitution is nothing more than the permanent guarantee of agreements that arise from the overcoming of conflicts. The true legislator is compared by Plato with the physician. Such comparisons run through Plato's entire work and are a basis of his political theory. What we call medicine today seems in many ways to correspond to the image of the doctor, which Plato uses as a negative example here, namely the doctor who is only interested in the sick and pays no attention to the healthy body. In the course of the security system that determines the present day, this even goes so far that even the person who is not currently ill is regarded as at least potentially ill or as disease carrier. However, no activity can succeed if its focus is not first properly considered. Otherwise, there is the danger that one chooses the wrong means and then makes and perpetuates it to the end, so that it is not noticed that it was the wrong means.

According to Greek – not only platonic – theory, medicine consists of two parts: the teaching of the way of life of the healthy and the teaching of healing the sick.² The doctrine of the healthy person's way of life takes precedence. This is also reflected in the declining importance of the three medical disciplines of dietetics, pharmacology and surgery. The orientation towards the correct diet of the healthy person gives direction to the whole of medicine. The Hippocratic Oath, for example, bears witness to this value system.

¹ All quotations from Plato's works are from: Plato in Twelve Volumes, London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1967 & 1968. The Laws are in Vols. 10 & 11 translated by R.G. Bury.

² Cf. Picht...

Greek medicine assumed that it was methodologically impossible to define a disease as long as one did not know what health was. This follows the rule that always the good and the complete figures as a measure and not any deficient realisation. The comparison between the art of healing and statecraft is based on the fact that, according to Plato, there is a close connection between the two arts. For according to Plato, the lifestyle that man needs in order to be healthy is not possible in a bad constitution. In a bad constitution, the corruption of morals inevitably corrupts the health of the citizens. This leads also to the diseases of civilisation which are a major concern for doctors and medicine in our days. The art of healing therefore presupposes the art of statecraft, and conversely, the art of statecraft depends for its orientation on knowledge that only the art of healing can provide. - This is yet to come.

The best thing of all, according to Plato in the passage quoted earlier, is not self-control. It is only the best that the establishment of a state, the legislation, can achieve. So it is only second best. It is oriented towards a best that it cannot achieve itself, but which sets the standard. This can be read about later in the Laws: This best is the God who is the measure of all things, not just any man (716c). Therefore, human goods must also be distinguished from divine goods. Wealth, strength, beauty and health are only true goods in general if they are informed by bravery, justice, prudence and insight (631c). The general value and humanity of goods such as wealth and health is only secured by the fact that they are not desirable for themselves - as it were, without regard to losses. In this case, their definition threatens to be subject to a narrowing of perspective that transforms mere quantities (money supply, life span) into qualities. Thus, these goods ultimately prove to be unattainable, for they seem to extend into infinity, since the "plus one" is conceivable for every quantity of wealth and life span. It should only be noted in passing that such a quantifying understanding of human life is also the basis for the fundamental aberration in dealing with the emergence of the novel corona virus. An abstract understanding of health that does not perceive it in its full psycho-social dimension is declared the all-determining goal of politics. On the other hand, the divine goods set a certain standard that cannot be determined by health or wealth itself.

Thus we also deduce from this passage that the physician, as a model for the legislator, will also share the latter's fate: With his concern for health, he is indeed providing a *conditio sine qua non*, but the goal of health is not health itself, it is outside it. For the Athenian in Plato's Laws also health is not to be measured according to a human measure, but according to a divine measure. - So it would be better for some people not to have the strength to do what they want. In which case a disease would be ethically beneficial. The extent to which illnesses in general can represent important developmental steps in a person's life is not Plato's subject, but should also be considered.

But even in the search for a way to heal the individual sick person, the doctor needs to take another look. He must not rely on a single symptom, or even take an organ for himself without considering its organic context and also the context in which the patient lives. Connections, however, can only be understood by those who know about them, they cannot be directly deduced from the facts at hand. Here again it is a comparison that makes Plato refer to the doctor's technique. Thus in the Phaedrus rhetoric is compared with the art of healing:

Socrates: The method of the art of healing is much the same as that of rhetoric.

Phaedrus: How so?

Socrates: In both cases you must analyze a nature, in one that of the body and in the other that of the soul, if you are to proceed in a scientific manner, not merely by practice and routine, to impart health and strength to the body by prescribing medicine and diet, or by proper discourses and training to give to the soul the desired belief and virtue.

Phaedrus: That, Socrates, is probably true.

Socrates: Now do you think one can acquire any appreciable knowledge of the nature of the soul without knowing the nature of the whole man?

Phaedrus: If Hippocrates the Asclepiad is to be trusted, one cannot know the nature of the body, either, except in that way.

Socrates: He is right, my friend; however, we ought not to be content with the authority of Hippocrates, but to see also if our reason agrees with him on examination.

Phaedrus: I assent.

Socrates: Then see what [270d] Hippocrates and true reason say about nature. In considering the nature of anything, must we not consider first, whether that in respect to which we wish to be learned ourselves and to make others learned is simple or multiform, and then, if it is simple, enquire what power of acting it possesses, or of being acted upon, and by what, and if it has many forms, number them, and then see in the case of each form, as we did in the case of the simple nature, what its action is and how it is acted upon and by what?"(270c-e)¹

Giftedness, knowledge and practice, which are mentioned before, are so self-evident as conditions of good medical practice that they are not even explained in detail. In addition, the physician must have self-knowing reason (269d), he must recognise the physicality of the body within the whole of nature. It is not enough for the doctor to know what he can achieve with which means, but he must investigate the circumstances in which he uses his means for a purpose that is beneficial to the whole. This is by no means a matter of course, as the following example may show.

Although I am not a physician myself, I will try to describe what this means for a particular treatment situation in modern times - even if this is only based on anecdotal evidence, as it were: Let us assume that a patient comes to a doctor, a professor of internal medicine, a specialist in the digestive organs, who is currently working on a drug trial for the treatment of ulcerative colitis. The patient complains of abdominal pain and an altered defecation. A colonoscopy shows the doctor the changes typical of ulcerative colitis. He now knows the cause of the patient's symptoms and has a participant for his current study. Because he has a name for the observed phenomenon, he does not ask any further questions about its cause (the problem is already known to Plato's reader from the allegory of the cave, in which we are all sitting in; everyone is looking for names, nobody for causes). Because the patient is getting worse and worse with this treatment, he later visits another therapist. The latter tells the patient about his problems, how he is doing and what

¹ Plato. Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 9 translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1925.

kind of complaints he has. Because all of this is true, the patient feels very confident in the doctor. The doctor then examines the patient, based on the knowledge that the body as a whole already has its own reflexivity on a physical level. This means that the body itself expresses how it feels as a whole, how it is composed in its entire organic context. Thus he sees (by the change in the patient's iris) that it is not the intestine as such that is diseased, but that it is the pancreas that causes the further problems. After appropriate treatment, the patient recovers. What did the healing doctor do in contrast to the non-healing one? He looked to see if the disease is one or many things. Then he looked at each disease to see what work and suffering was inherent in it and then, with reference to the patient's entire physical condition, he made a diagnosis and started treatment. Imagine that the professor comes to his diagnosis using the most modern medical equipment and representations of the body of the patient, while the other therapist needs his own eyes and a magnifying glass. By the way the cost of the two examinations is about 40 to 1. - This should only be reported so that we can see that Plato's considerations regarding the artful determination of the disease have an effect directly in the treatment room.

Thus, on the one hand, science gives orientation within the medical activity, it must look at the whole first of the patient then of the patient's living circumstances. On the other hand, however, medical activity itself must also be classified, because it also has its place in a whole that encompasses it. The divine measure has already been mentioned briefly, so the whole of the physical body, within which the body stands, must also be located within the whole of the Logos, reason. In the dialogue of Gorgias the art of healing is again discussed within a comparison. Thus Socrates distinguishes body and soul and assigns to both a specific art that determines their right order and one that restores a wrong order. For the body this is gymnastics and healing, and for the soul it is legislation and justice. These four are distinguished by the fact that they aim for the best constitution on the path of comparison and distinction. On the other hand, each of these four activities is assigned a seeming art, which it only imitates, but does not really aim for the best, but only for the immediately pleasant: Socrates calls it flattery and the flattering form of the art of healing is the art of cooking. It would not be able to give a prescription or convince people of the need for a change of behaviour, but it is to serve the undetermined needs. The art of cooking is based only on routine practice (*empeiria*), it has no knowledge (*episteme*) and therefore no self-knowledge. You could say it has know how but it has no know what. To do this, one would have to do psychology, which means that the doctor would also have to look for it if he didn't want to remain a mere culinary lifestyle artist.

In the fourth book of laws Plato takes up the comparison with the doctor again: There are two kinds of doctors. One is the real doctors, the other are only the servants of doctors, although we call both doctors. The second kind is also called "the slaves" for short. The doctors whom Plato characterises as slaves practise medicine in the hospitals or when visiting patients in such a way that they give strict rules to their patients in a complacent way like tyrants but are not prepared to engage in conversation with the patients, to explain their rules to the patients, to inform the patients about their diseases, or even to listen to them and let the patients inform them about their diseases themselves. They appear to be omniscient, and it is from this that we can see that this knowledge is only a presumed knowledge that they have inherited second hand from real doctors, or from a routine called "experience". This type of doctor is perfectly suitable for slaves who are used to obeying orders.

By wandering around with universal prescriptions and authoritative-sounding speech, they could easily be mistaken for the scientific doctor. But they do not orientate themselves to the individual case, for which they only have standard prescriptions at hand, by not meeting the particular one, but they also do not have generally valid knowledge. Rather, the ready-made prescriptions obstruct their view of the individual case, which is why, strictly speaking, they have neither *empeiria* nor *episteme*. They only simulate the art of medicine and are adept at it, but without any artful *techne*.

The behaviour of the true doctors, whom Plato also calls "the free", is quite different. Their main concern is the natural diagnosis of the disease. To do this, they need to talk to the patient and his relatives, because they know that they first have to learn how to behave towards each patient. At the same time, however, they make every effort, as far as possible, to instruct the patient about the right therapy in such a way that he or she can see it for himself or herself. They try to convince him to accept the therapy, to overcome his inner resistance, and only then give an order when it can no longer be avoided. These are the real doctors, because only this method leads the doctor himself to an understanding of the nature of the illness. It is to them, therefore, that all real knowledge in medicine goes back; and even the slave doctors can only do their job if the real doctors transmit their science to them.

But the therapy of the real doctors is not suitable for slaves, but only for free people. As always when Plato or Aristotle speak of free or slaves, this is - contrary to most interpretations - not to be understood historically, as if Plato spoke of the fact that according to social position there are slaves who are assigned to slave doctors. Rather, such provisions should be understood as a concept. Which is why it must first be asked who is really a free and a slave. The result would then sometimes be that there are social free people who are actually slaves and that there may also be slaves who are actually free in the conceptual sense. So here "free people" means those patients who are willing and able to act according to a knowledge gained (720a-e). While the slave is subject not of his own knowledge but of someone else's prescriptions. For Plato, the legislators of the present day resemble slave doctors, for they order, forbid and threaten with punishment instead of convincing the citizens and educating them.

He returns to this later in the *Nomoi*: "It was no bad comparison we made when we compared all existing legislation to the doctoring of slaves by slaves. For one should carefully notice this, that if any of the doctors who practice medicine by purely empirical methods, [857d] devoid of theory, were to come upon a free-born doctor conversing with a free-born patient, and using arguments, much as a philosopher would, dealing with the course of the ailment from its origin and surveying the natural constitution of the human body,—he would at once break out into a roar of laughter, and the language he would use would be none other than that which always comes ready to the tongue of most so-called "doctors": "You fool," he would say, "you are not doctoring your patient, but schooling him, so to say, as though what he wanted was to be made, not a sound man, [857e] but a doctor."

Clinias: And in saying so, would he not be right?

Athenian: Possibly, provided that he should also take the view that the man who treats of laws in the way that we are now doing is schooling the citizens rather than legislating. Would he not seem to be right in saying that, too?

It is the essence of *techne* that it makes the person to whom it is applied better. This is also the case with medicine understood as *techne*. It ensures that the patient understands and is thus free from his own natural constitution. The patient no longer puzzles and is no longer afraid of the vagueness of his complaints, but knows what he has. Then he can prepare himself, come to terms with it or fight against the illness. He then does this with the help of the doctor, but he himself, the patient - in modern terms - remains the logical subject. He does not become the object of the doctor. The free doctor makes himself superfluous, while the slave doctor makes his patient dependant on him. The slave doctors may therefore also be among those who practice *nosotrophia*, nutrition of the disease, as it is called in the dialogue on the Republic (book III). The real disease is that one is constantly worried about one's health and therefore constantly goes to the doctor or asks him for advice.

In this way, the doctor also stands in a political context. His behaviour shapes the political constitution of the state, just as the state gives him a model for his actions. The physician who treats his patients like slaves should always remember that he is at the same time a citizen and may only complain that his government treats him as a slave if he, in turn, endeavours to treat his patients as free human beings, as far as it can be justified. Only then can he as a citizen demand that his government treats him as a free citizen. - The same applies, by the way, to teachers and judges: every responsible person must educate his subordinates to act as free human beings.

(2) Philosophy Superior to Medicine

In the Symposium, in giving different perspectives on the essence of Eros, Plato has various figures representing the historical forms of knowledge in ancient Greece.¹ From the poetic (Phaidros) to the historical (Pausanias) to the technical-medical knowledge (Eryximachos). This technical knowledge aims at the unity of the isolated. From the doubled figure of Eros the god emerges as the one coherently: "how mighty and wonderful and universal is the sway of this god over all affairs both human and divine" (186b) says Eryximachos the physician. This knowledge is a *techne*, a skill. It recognises the God's great and unified power and form.

The physician Eryximachos corrects and expands the speech of his predecessor, for Eros does not only work among humans, but also in all animals and plants, indeed in all nature. Thus the view of Eryximachos widens in the way described above, which is necessary for the artful doctor, towards the whole of nature. He does not speak of an autonomy of man against nature, or even of a mastery of nature. Man and his physician do not have control over nature, he is rather subject to its laws. This knowledge is the most important precondition for the practical work of the doctor.

This law consists in the fact that the unequal strives towards the unequal. Unity arises from difference. This applies to everything that can be called one. According to the Pythagorean influenced theory on which Eryximachos is based, medicine deals with cold and warm, dry and moist. These are the basic elements of the organic nature, from the various mixtures of which the

¹ Cf. Uhde2015.

medical theory of the Greeks also developed the doctrine of the four temperaments. Medicine, as it is understood here, is not only about physical health but also about mental balance. It is in this context that Eryximachos says that the task of medicine is to create harmony between these opposites in nature (186e). This is the essence of the successful creation of medicine as well as any other art (techne): it is able to give its work an orderly and beautifully structured constitution (systasis) (Gor 503e-504a).

But Plato himself lets Eryximachos say that he does not fully understand the knowledge of principles he invokes. In the Symposium we are only present at those principles when Alkibiades finally rips off the mask of Socrates, whereby the common philosophical knowledge which has entered into the appearance of Socrates becomes visible in its unity.¹

(3) The Hippocratic Corpus on the Nature of Medicine

What do the medical sources themselves say on the subject of the nature of medicine and its correct method? In the Corpus Hippocraticum there is a rich collection of various writings by different authors from a period of about 500 years. Some of them are very close to the ideas that were probably already suitable for the koic physician Hippocrates himself and thus also close in time to Plato's work. The author of *De Priscina Medicina* would probably not want to contradict the distinction between medicine and philosophy; on the contrary, he would want to make it even stricter - albeit with motives that are contrary to those of Plato:

“Whoever having undertaken to speak or write on Medicine, have first laid down for themselves some hypothesis to their argument, such as hot, or cold, or moist, or dry, or whatever else they choose (thus reducing their subject within a narrow compass, and supposing only one or two original causes of diseases or of death among mankind), are all clearly mistaken in much that they say; [...] Wherefore I have not thought that it stood in need of an empty hypothesis, like those subjects which are occult and dubious, in attempting to handle which it is necessary to use some hypothesis; as, for example, with regard to things above us and things below the earth; if anyone should treat of these and undertake to declare how they are constituted, the reader or hearer could not find out, whether what is delivered be true or false; for there is nothing which can be referred to in order to discover the truth.” (Hp VM 1)²

The doctrine of the hippocratic treatises *Prognostic*, *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, and *Epidemics I. and III* is aptly summarised by W. H. S. Jones in the following way:

“(1) Diseases have a natural course, which the physician must know thoroughly, so as to decide whether the issue will be favourable or fatal.

(2) Diseases are caused by a disturbance in the composition of the constituents of the body. This disturbance is connected with atmospheric and climatic conditions.

¹ Cf. Uhde 2015.

² All quotations of the Hippocratic corpus are from: Hippocrates Collected Works I. Hippocrates. W. H. S. Jones. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1868.
(<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0251%3Atext%3DVM>)

(3) Nature tries to bring these irregularities to a normal state, apparently by the action of innate heat, which "concocts" the "crude" humours of the body.

(4) There are "critical" days at fixed dates, when the battle between nature and disease reaches a crisis.

(5) Nature may win, in which case the morbid matters in the body are either evacuated or carried off in anapostasis, or the "coction" of the morbid elements may not take place, in which case the patient dies.

(6) All the physician can do for the patient is to give nature a chance, to remove by regimen all that may hinder nature in her beneficent work."

The author of the Hippocratic writings has a peculiar understanding of the nature of "hypothesis". For him, it denotes a proposition aimed at a generality, which does not concern itself with the inclusion of all the individual facts, which is why it seems to him to be empty speculation, from which the doctor should keep away.

As a technique that is successful in practice, medicine does not need empty speculation, it would threaten its credibility as a craft. Especially towards the uneducated, it is completely inappropriate to start out with hypotheses. He does not understand them and therefore does not seek treatment: "For merely an effort of memory (*anamimnestekai*) is required of each man when he listens to a statement of his experiences. But if you miss being understood by laymen, and fail to put your hearers in this condition, you will miss reality. Therefore for this reason also medicine has no need of any postulate." (VM 2) Medicine was developed from the observation of health-promoting foods, which had to be modified accordingly for the patient. "To such a discovery and investigation what more suitable name could one give than that of Medicine? Since it was discovered for the health of man, for his nourishment and safety, as a substitute for that kind of diet by which pains, diseases, and deaths were occasioned." (VM3)

There is no attainable truth criterion for speculating on the whole. There is, however, a criterion for the skill of the doctor: the healthy or sick condition of his client, from which it can be seen whether you have a good or a bad expert before you. Therefore, medicine can be a *techne* even without the citation of exaggerated speculation. On the contrary, a doctor must defend himself against the suspicion of "philosophising" in such a charlatan way. One does indeed have the impression that the author of *De Priscina Medicina* is responding directly to Plato, indeed, in refusing to speculate on the whole, he is directly using Plato's words (*peri ton meteoroon e toon hypo geen*).¹

But there is also a positive reference, the author speaks of the fact that for a successful therapy it is necessary for the patient to feel reminded of his own condition (*anamimnestekai*) through the words of the doctor. The conviction that science can only be built on the foundation of knowledge that is accepted and acknowledged in the same way by all those involved, connects him with Plato. A failure to achieve this common ground is tantamount to a failure to reach objective truth:

¹ This has been remarked by Diller 1952.

“Certain sophists and physicians say that it is not possible for anyone to know medicine who does not know what man is [and how he was made and how constructed], and that whoever would cure men properly, must learn this in the first place. But this saying rather appertains to philosophy, as Empedocles and certain others have described what man is in his origin, and how he first was made and constructed. But I think whatever such has been said or written by sophist or physician concerning nature has less connection with the art of medicine than with the art of writing.”

(VM20)

The art of writing works with a fixed set of letters and puts them together, the doctor, on the other hand, is dealing with individuals who need help. For this reason – for example – the effect of a foodstuff should be described in detail in order to provide evidence for the therapeutic approach to be taken. Not general hypotheses help in the situation but only the descent into the singularization of the individual circumstance. This is what the author of *De Priscina Medicina* describes with reference to cheese.

“Cheese” is an interesting topic that shows us how connected the medical and the philosophical discussions were. Plato also speaks of cheese in the *Nomoi*. He does this to criticise the hasty rejection of the educational use of symposia by the illiterate Cretan Kleinias and the Spartan Megillos:

“Athenian: In my opinion all those who take up an institution for discussion and propose, at its first mention, to censure it or commend it, are proceeding in quite the wrong way. Their action is like that of a man who, when he hears somebody praising cheese as a good food, at once starts to disparage it, without having learnt either its effects or its mode of administration-in what form it should be administered and by whom and with what accompaniments, and in what condition and to people in what condition. [638d]”

The Platonic investigation is thus by no means based on abstract postulates, but on the contrary on a very precise perception of the phenomena that are particular to each case. Only slave doctors would come up with ready-made doctrines and prescriptions, whereas the free doctor would first examine the respective circumstances. According to Phaedrus, mere book knowledge is not enough for this either. This is what the author of *De Priscina Medicina* demands, who does not contradict Plato in practice, even if he does not want any theory to be true.

(4) The Hippocratic Oath: Helping Nature to Grow

In the course of the theology of the tenth book of *Nomoi*, the Athenian distinguishes the serious from the merely playful arts. Their difference is that the serious arts create and work with and from the physis: Healing, gymnastics and agriculture are among them. The non-serious arts, on the other hand, stem from the attempt to empower man against nature. - By functioning, such arts show themselves to be part of nature. However, by destroying and consuming nature they show themselves as being falsely called arts and as untrue.

The Hippocratic Oath is a testimony to medical self-understanding as a helper of nature, who is absolutely obliged to its growth and therefore does not want to harm it under any circumstances.

Beginning and ending with the invocation of the gods (1; 9), the apprentice of medicine places his activity in an unavailable independent framework. Nevertheless, the art can be learned and passed on without restraint: it is not the property of a family or an elitist business, but anyone who can and wants to learn should have access to it. The apprentice as well as the master emphasises the indispensable role of his own abilities and medical judgement (3). Connected with this is the fundamental admission of their fallibility. As much as there is a subject matter to be taught (2), a term from the world of sophistic teaching, its effectiveness cannot be separated from the personality of the doctor, which contradicts sophistic common sense. Therefore, *techne* and *bios* must go hand in hand, which is the fundamental difference between the art of medicine and all sophistic endeavour (5). Therefore, it is not enough to pay for the apprenticeship, one must also prove to be grateful and worthy of it. Science, art and technology are intertwined: aetiology, nosology and pathology based on the signs of disease are followed by diagnosis, prognosis and therapeutic indication for the patient. The case of illness must be penetrated mentally and treated with skill, not only when the surgeon cuts, but also when preparing medicine and examining the patient at his bedside. Experience, theory and practice intertwine in the doctor's technique.

The fact that the oath as well as Plato's considerations was certainly not a testimony to the general Greek attitude towards medicine to the medical ethos does not touch its deeper truth. Rather, it is a testimony to the "general attitudes". They will not correspond to the views of Plato's high philosophy. But that does not bother them.

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